



Ag & Hort Update



March 2009

Precipitation has been a little above average for our area this winter and I expect to see good moisture at planting time. This fall did not allow us to get as much field work done as we had hoped, so hopefully we will get an early start this spring. Soil conditions are very important at planting. The day you plant that kernel is the most important day of that plant's life. Spring will be here before you know it so start getting your planters and sprayers ready to go. Do not forget about those grain bins; keep checking them throughout the winter and spring.

I would also like to inform you of my departure from Shelby County Extension. Although it has been a short stay, I have been presented an opportunity that I cannot pass up. I cherish all the friends that I have made through my endeavors with the Shelby County Extension.

Kent Ganzer

Upcoming Dates:

March 4 – Turfgrass CIC Training @ 1:30 p.m.

March 11 – Handlers CIC Training @ 9:00 a.m.

March 11-12 – Triumph of Ag Expo

March 12 – Emerald Ash Borer Program @ 6:00 p.m., Auble Room Myrtue Memorial Hospital

March 19 – 4H Pancake Supper, Vets Auditorium 5:00-7:30 p.m.

March 28 – 4H/FFA Swine Weigh-In, 8:00-10:00 a.m.

April 7 – Private Pesticide Training, Shelby 9:30 a.m.

April 25 – 4H/FFA Sheep and Goat Weigh-In

Emerald Ash Borer Seminar, March 12

Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is an unwanted pest in Iowa. It has destroyed over 5 million ash trees in Michigan and has spread into Illinois and is inching ever so close to Eastern Iowa. Several DNR regulations are in place in several Midwestern states to try and slow the spread of this very destructive pest.

Mark Shour, ISU Extension Entomologist, will be presenting the seminar. Mark will discuss the EAB movement, DNR regulations on the EAB and how to detect and identify the EAB. Mark will also touch on other diseases and pests that are here in Iowa or in close proximity. To make sure that we have enough material available, we ask that you RSVP by calling 755-3104 by March 5. The meeting will take place Thursday night March 12 at 6:30 p.m. in the Auble Room at Myrtue Memorial Hospital.

Master Gardeners or Master Gardener Interns: If you attend this meeting you will get educational credit hours.

Spring Pruning of Small Fruit Trees

Small fruits that are commonly grown in home gardens include raspberries, grapes, gooseberries, currants and blueberries. For maximum production, small fruit crops need to be pruned in late winter/early spring (March/early April). Proper pruning procedures for raspberries, grapes, gooseberries, currants and blueberries are outlined below.

Raspberries

The pruning procedures for raspberries are based on the growth and fruiting characteristics of the plants.

Summer-Bearing Red Raspberries

Remove all weak, diseased and damaged canes at ground level in March or early April. Leave the most vigorous canes, those approximately 1/4 inch in diameter when measured 30 inches from the ground. After thinning, remaining canes should be spaced about 6 inches apart.

Also, prune out the tips of the canes that have died due to winter injury. Cut back to live tissue. If the canes sustained little winter dieback, remove the top 1/4 of the canes. Cane-tip removal or "heading-back" prevents the canes from becoming top heavy and bending over under the weight of the crop.

Red raspberries sucker profusely from their roots. Plants should be maintained in a one- to two-foot-wide hedgerow using a rototiller or spade. Remove or destroy those shoots that emerge outside the one- to two-foot-wide hedgerow.

Fall-Bearing Red Raspberries (Two Crop System)

Follow the same pruning procedures as described for the summer-bearing red raspberries. This pruning option provides both a summer and fall crop.

Fall-Bearing Red Raspberries (One Crop System)

Prune all canes back to ground level in March or early April. While the plants won't produce a summer crop, the late summer/early fall crop should mature one to two weeks earlier. Also, total crop yield is typically larger using the one-crop system versus the two-crop system.

Maintain the plants in a one- to two-foot-wide hedgerow.

Black and Purple Raspberries

Remove the small, weak canes, leaving only four or five of the largest, most vigorous canes per clump or plant. Cut back the lateral (side) branches to 12 inches in length for black raspberries and 18 inches for purple raspberries.

Grapes

Grapevines produce fruit clusters on the previous season's growth. Before pruning, a grapevine may have 200 to 300 buds capable of producing fruit. If the vine is not pruned, the number of grape clusters would be excessive and the grapevine would be unable to ripen the large crop or produce adequate vegetative growth.

To maximize crop yields, grapevines are trained to a specific system. The most common training system used by home gardeners is the four-cane Kniffin system. The four-cane Kniffin system is popular because of its simplicity. In the four-cane Kniffin system, the canes of the grapevine grow on two wires, one located three feet above the ground and the second six feet high.

If using the four-cane Kniffin system, select four canes on the upper wire, two going in each direction. Also, select four canes on the lower wire. To aid identification, some gardeners tie brightly colored ribbons or strips of cloth on those canes they wish to retain. All remaining one-year-old canes should be completely removed.

Going back to the upper wire, select two of the remaining four canes (one going in each direction). Prune these canes back to one or two buds. These short one or two bud canes are referred to as renewal spurs. The renewal spurs provide the shoots or canes that will produce next year's crop. Prune the remaining two canes on the upper wire back to eight to 13 buds. The number of buds left on the fruiting canes is determined by plant vigor. If the grapevine is vigorous, leave 13 buds per cane. Leave only eight buds per cane if the grapevine possesses poor vigor.

Prune the four canes on the lower wire the same as those on the upper wire. When pruning is complete, no more than 60 buds should remain on the grapevine. When counting the number of buds on the grapevine, include both the buds on the fruiting canes and those on the renewal spurs.

Gooseberries and Currants

Gooseberries and currants produce the majority of their fruit on 2- and 3-year-old shoots. Shoots that are 4 years old and older produce very little fruit. After the first growing season, remove all but six to eight vigorous, healthy shoots. The following year, leave four or five 1-year-old shoots and three or four 2-year-old canes. After the third growing season, keep three or four shoots each of 1-, 2-, and 3-year-old growth. A properly pruned, established plant should consist of nine to 12 shoots. Pruning of mature plants consists of pruning out all 4-year-old shoots and thinning out some of the new growth.

Blueberries

Blueberry plants are shrubs like currants and gooseberries. Blueberry yields and fruit quality decline when blueberry shoots (stems) reach 5 years of age. In late winter/early spring, prune out any dead or diseased stems. Also, prune out stems that are 5 years old and older. Allow one to two new shoots to develop each year.

The pruning of small fruits really isn't difficult. It requires a basic understanding of plant growth and pruning techniques, proper pruning equipment and (sometimes) a little bit of courage.

Information provided by Richard Jauron, ISU Extension Horticulturist

Crop Insurance has some Changes for 2009

Crop insurance indemnity prices, guarantees and premiums were all at record levels for corn and soybeans in 2008. Current market conditions make it unlikely that those levels will be reached again in 2009, but they will still be attractive. The Risk Management Agency has announced indemnity prices of \$4 per bushel for corn and \$9.90 per bushel for soybeans for APH (yield) insurance guarantees for 2009, the second highest prices ever offered. Prices for revenue insurance policies will not be known until the end of February.

Producers should carefully calculate their insurance coverage needs before meeting with their crop insurance agent this year. Higher input costs and lower indemnity prices mean farmers will have to choose a higher percentage level of coverage to protect their costs of production.

Payments in 2008

Loss payouts in Iowa for 2008 crops were substantial. Yield losses from flooding and wet weather were significant, but the biggest factor was the large decrease in market prices from February to harvest time. As of late January, insurance companies had paid out an average of \$20.47 per acre for corn losses and \$24.52 per acre for soybeans losses. Payments amounted to 90 percent of the premiums paid by Iowa farmers for corn, and 139 percent of the premiums paid for soybeans.

Payments for Revenue Assurance (RA) policies were larger than for Crop Revenue Coverage (CRC) policies. This was because CRC insurance had price movement limits from February to harvest of \$1.50 and \$3.00 per bushel for corn and soybeans, respectively. The downward limits have been removed for 2009, and an upward limit equal to twice the February price has been established for both CRC and RA insurance.

Biotech Endorsement

A premium discount for planting certain biotech corn hybrids was made available to corn growers in Iowa, Illinois, Indiana and Minnesota last year. The Biotech Endorsement (BE) option has been extended to the remaining Corn Belt states. Hybrids containing YieldGuard, Herculex or Agrisure genetics may be eligible. Farmers must plant at least 75 percent of the corn acres in an insurance unit to an approved hybrid. Discounts averaged about 13 percent last year, or a little over \$3 per acre. The discounts are not available for the group risk insurance policies, GRP and GRIP, however.

Enterprise and Whole Farm Units

RMA has changed the subsidy rates for policies in which insured acres are grouped into enterprise or whole farm units. Enterprise units include all acres of one crop grown in the same county by one producer on a single policy. Whole farm units combine all crops into a single policy. Since the likelihood of a large indemnity payment is smaller as more acres are combined, these units have always had lower premiums than basic or optional units. Before this year, these units received the same percent premium subsidy from RMA as basic units did. Now they will receive the same dollar value of subsidy, which will be a higher percent. At the 75 percent coverage level, for example, basic units receive a 55 percent premium subsidy while enterprise units will receive a 77 percent subsidy and whole farm units will receive an 80 percent subsidy (see table). Producers with multiple farming units who want to lower their crop insurance premiums may want to consider applying for enterprise or whole farm units this year.

By William Edwards, Departments of Economics

What are the Right Tools for the Job?

When pruning trees and shrubs, you need to start with the right tools. There are various types of pruning tools. Generally, the best tool for the job is determined by the size of the plant material and the situation. First, select high quality tools, high quality tools are not inexpensive. However, if they are used and cared for properly, they will perform better and outlast the poor quality, less expensive choices.

Hand pruners or pruning shears are generally used for cutting branches up to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter. There are two basic types of hand pruners. Scissor type pruners have curved blades that overlap (scissor action) when making the cut. Anvil-type pruners have a sharpened upper blade which cuts against a flat surface (anvil). Each type of pruner is available in different sizes. Generally, scissor-type hand pruners are preferred over the anvil-types. Sharp, properly used scissor-type pruners make close, clean cuts. Anvil-types can't cut as close as scissor-types and generally crush the stems when pruning.

Attempting to prune branches larger than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter with hand pruners often results in torn, jagged pruning cuts to the plants and may damage your pruning shears. Branches from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1-1/2 inches in diameter can be effectively cut with lopping shears. Lopping shears consist of blades attached to long handles. The long handles provide more leverage, so cuts can be made through larger branches. Lopping shears are also excellent for pruning difficult to reach branches. Pruning saws are used on branches larger than 1-3/4 inch in diameter. Small tree branches that are hard to reach from the ground can be pruned with a pole saw or pole pruner. A pole saw is essentially a saw blade attached to a long pole. Pole pruners consist of a stationary hook and hinged blade operated by a rope and mounted on a long wooden or fiberglass pole. Pole saws and pole pruners can usually be used on branches up to 2 inches in diameter. A chain saw is the last tool used by the home gardener. The chain saw is used on large tree branches, however chain saws can be extremely dangerous when used by home gardeners that have little experience or skill operating these. Home gardeners should use pruning saws rather than chain saws when pruning trees. Never cut or prune large tree branches that are near or in contact with power lines, always contact a trained arborist. One last tool that is used would be the hedge shears. Hedge shears (manual or electric) are used to shear formal hedges to definite shape and size. They should never be used as a pruning tool.

Information gathered from James Romer, ISU Horticulturist.